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THE FEMALE SCHOOL DROPOUT, SOME ASPECTS OF HER MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MANAGEMENT.

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THIS STUDY ATTEMPTED TO FIND OUT WHAT THE FEMALE DROPOUT NEEDS TO LEARN TO IMPROVE HER EFFECTIVENESS AS WIFE AND MOTHER AND HOW WELL HOMEMAKING PROGRAMS, IN SCHOOL OR OUT, SUPPLY THIS NEED. OF THE 167 GIRLS WHO LEFT SCHOOL IN BURLINGTON, VERMONT, DURING THE JUNIOR OR SENIOR YEAR FROM JANUARY 1960 TO JUNE 1963, 20 OF THE 40 WHO MARRIED WERE INTERVIEWED. QUESTIONS COVERED PERSONAL DATA, PRESENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, AND EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES. SCHOOL RECORDS PROVIDED FACTS ON INTELLIGENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT. THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE WIVES AT MARRIAGE WAS 17.1 YEARS, THAT OF THE HUSBANDS 19.5 YEARS. FIFTY PERCENT WERE PREMARITALLY PREGNANT. THE MEDIAN GRADE LEVEL ACHIEVED BY BOTH HUSBANDS AND WIVES WAS LESS THAN GRADE 9. MOST OF THE COUPLES WERE NOT DOING WELL FINANCIALLY. THE EXTENSION PROGRAM HAD BEEN INEFFECTIVE WITH THIS GROUP. IMPLICATIONS ARE -- (1) THE POTENTIAL DROPOUT CAN BE IDENTIFIED AND SHOULD BE PLACED IN A PROGRAM TO FIT HER NEEDS, (2) EXTENSION HOME ECONOMICS PROGRAMS SHOULD MAKE PROVISIONS FOR THIS GROUP, AND (3) PROFESSIONAL HOME ECONOMICS TRAINING SHOULD PROVIDE UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC GROUPS. (MS)

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THE FEMALE SCHOOL DROPOUT

Some Aspects of Her Marriage and Family Management

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THE FEMALE SCHOOL DROPOUT

Some Aspects of Her Marriage and Family Management[1]

BY

FAITH PRIOR

Impact of Homemaking Education

The present study grows from the writer's experience as a homemaking teacher in junior-senior high schools, and as a home management specialist in the Cooperative Extension Service. Observation of the increasing number of girls leaving school for youthful marriage could only lead to speculation (based on classroom performance) that they were entering this new phase of life magnificently unprepared for the role of wife and mother.

Almost as disturbing was the fact that the majority of these girls simply disappeared from the school scene without leaving a ripple; other girls might come back to school to tell about their accomplishments, to talk about their goals, but the vast majority of school dropouts was never heard from again. If it were not for the notations on her school records, and the half-completed sewing project bundled in her locker, the teacher might almost delude herself that the student had never existed.

In the two years spent as a home management specialist in the Cooperative Extension Service, the author has not found these missing girls. The Extension home economists who are devoting their days to the needs of their clientele in the counties — they do not see them. Colleague-specialists do not work with them in nutrition, in clothing. They do not, according to specialists in publications and in the mass media, send for bulletins, or comment on radio and television programs. They do not bring their children (and surely there are children) to the University nursery school. Where they are and how they are doing become rather persistent questions when one hopes to plan and implement a program which meets the real needs of people.

The problem of the school dropout is not a fictional one. In the state of Vermont, of the 4,810 ninth graders in school in 1958-59, only 3,315 were graduated from high school in 1962 -- a percentage of 68.9. (22) Nor do these figures take into account the large number leaving school at the first legal moment — the attainment of age 16 or the completion of grade 8.

A significant number of those who do not finish high school marry. In the years 1958 through 1962, the percentage of brides in their teens has risen as high as 52.2 percent and has not dropped lower than 49.8 percent. The same years show a steady increase from 15.4 percent to 18.6 percent for grooms not yet 20. (28)

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[1] Part of a Thesis Submitted to the Graduate College in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science.

But how successfully, the conscientious home economics educator is bound to ask, are these young brides functioning as wives and mothers, and to what extent have in-school homemaking experiences and out-of-school Extension programs contributed to their success?

What We Already Know

The two decades following World War II have seen investigation in the social sciences increasingly focused on youthfully marrying partners, and on the low-income family in an acknowledgedly affluent society.

Sociologists indicate that it is more than "low income" which sets certain families apart in a discernible pattern of stratification.

Warner, in his introduction to Social Class in America, says:

> All of us are trained to know and to cherish the ideals of democracy and to believe in the American dream which teaches most Americans that equal opportunity is here for all and that the chances for success for anyone lie within himself...But we only learn by hard experience...that some of the things we learned early in life exist only in our political ideals and are rarely found in the real world. We never learn these things in school, and no teacher teaches us the hard facts of our social class system.(31)

Yet social class, it would appear, is an important determinant of personality development and is a factor in the kinds of skills, abilities, and intelligence an individual uses to solve his problems. Therefore, if a pattern of stratification can be established for any group, this should represent a large step toward identification of the kinds of help he may be willing to accept in the interest of meeting his problems.

Hollingshead suggests that when social phenomena are to be viewed behaviorally, it is meaningful to break the social hierarchy into distinct social strata rather than to treat it as a continuum.

> This definition of class position is based on three assumptions: first, a family's mode of living is mirrored in its home; second, the occupation of the head reflects the skill and power associated with maintenance functions in the society; and third, the amount of formal education the head has received reflects the tastes of the family. The combination of these factors enables a researcher to determine within approximate limits the position the family occupies in the status structure...(14)

An analysis of stratification indexes shows that they all measure the same underlying dimensions. (17)

Investigators of the characteristics of partners in youthful marriages found a "clear, direct relationship between status levels and ages of bride and groom at marriage" (6) and that "measurement of socioeconomic background such as father's occupation and parent education levels showed that married girls have lower socioeconomic levels than a norm group." (3)

A study of the relationship of personality to early marriage showed that there are two types of marriage-oriented girls who emerge from a preadolescent group: the type who is emotionally insecure and thus feels propelled toward a relationship which holds out the promise of being happier than is her present unhappy environment, and the type who is early to mature and whose aspiration levels for herself as an individual and for herself in marriage are relatively low. (23) Another study supports the hypothesis that persons who marry demonstrate greater feelings of ego deficiency than do persons who remain single. "It may be," it is suggested, "that it is the immature or not so well adjusted person for whom marriage has its strongest appeal." (21)

In line with the findings concerning internal adjustment is the conclusion by Moss and Gingles (23) that girls who marry early have less satisfactory relationships with their parents. They show earlier patterns of dating and going steady. Their orientation is toward marriage as the basic goal of their lives, and they expect nothing from life except the opportunity to follow the traditional roles of wife and mother. Thirty-one percent of the girls in the Moss and Gingles study were pregnant when they were married.

Repeatedly appearing in studies of the characteristics of youthfully marrying girls are the factors of low intelligence (13), poor scholastic achievement, irregular attendance, low achievement scores, narrow range of subject choices (11), behavior problems, lack of leadership, and passive maladjustment in the school situation. (13) There is little aspiration for more education (23), and few return after dropping out of school. (5)

In the studies of the living patterns of youthful marriages, Inselberg (16) and Burchinal (4) found a lesser degree of stability and satisfaction, and a greater feeling of having been unready for marriage, particularly when premarital pregnancy was a factor. Research also shows that family income is low for the youthfully marrying couple, but that few wives are employed outside the home. A significant amount of aid is received from relatives and, in general, they are less able to maintain themselves than the average couple. As relationships improve with their own parents, wives tend to develop conflicts with their in-laws, but they do not lack friends among their peers. (16) There is a high percentage of unemployment and, in the face of a national technology which decreases daily the number of jobs open to the unschooled and unskilled, the prospect of employment is not bright. (2)

Lee Rainwater has contributed enormously to the knowledge of working class wives and mothers: one study examines the values and motivations of the wives of blue-collar workers (24) (a socioeconomic level somewhat above that which one might hypothesize for the youthfully marrying school

dropout); a second study investigates attitudes toward sex, contraception, and family planning in the lower socioeconomic classes. (25)

But nowhere does the literature yield an examination of how much homemaking has actually been studied by girls who drop out of school to marry, or how well they have retained and now evaluate specific subject areas taught in homemaking classes, in terms of the information and skills they have found necessary in their married role. Such work as has been done in surveying Extension programs has been based almost entirely on practices of the farm family, and on families having a socioeconomic level considerably higher than that of the average youthfully marrying school dropout.

Many studies include as a final recommendation the plea for more intensive work with homemakers in lower socioeconomic and educational levels. Chinniah (7), for example, found that mothers of low education were least likely to teach their children that nonmonetary resources may be substituted for money, and that priorities must be given to wants. ".... Extension workers and others interested in family and children's welfare should concentrate on lower educational groups," she concludes. Stinson (29), in summary, says much the same. "Those families of lower economic status are more in need of educational assistance in utilizing resources to close this gap between level and standard of consumption than are those of higher economic status."

The observation that traditional methods for out-of-school education are not geared to the social characteristics of the youthfully marrying school dropout is reinforced by Abell and Larson (1) who found that a low rate of adoption of recommended homemaking practices is associated with young age, low income, and low level of participation in formal organizations. Rust (26) showed that the largest proportion of women attending adult homemaking classes were high school graduates, 26 to 45 years old, with small families.

Gardner, in his introduction to Workingman's Wife, (24) charges a lack of understanding by middle-class people who "are usually the creative people and the decision makers," a lack which is reflected in the ineffective media judgments which they make in an effort to reach lower class people.

It would seem apparent that while considerable knowledge exists about the potential school dropout, and about the characteristics of members of the lower socioeconomic strata, not a great deal of use has been made of the information in evaluating home economics programs for content and method in terms of the real life situations of school dropouts who have established living patterns in their marriages.

The present concern, then, represents a pilot study — an attempt to begin to find answers to the questions: "What does the youthfully marrying female school dropout need to learn to improve her effectiveness in the roles of wife and mother?" and "How well is home economics, either in school or out, teaching her?"

METHODOLOGY

The problem, then, is threefold:

1. To indicate some common socioeconomic characteristics (if such exist) which might increase the understandings of educators working with girls who, in school, tend toward the profile of the potential school dropout, or educators who work with the young homemaker who has already dropped out of school.

2. To evaluate the utility of in-school homemaking experiences from the young homemaker's point of view, and to similarly evaluate her experience with and knowledge of the Extension home economics program.

3. To determine whether areas exist in which these young homemakers recognize lack of knowledge and experience (and in which they might therefore be expected to be most readily receptive to help).

For the purposes of this study, four hypotheses have been established:

1. The young homemaker with less than high school education does not fit a predictable social and personality pattern.

2. Less than high school education is not associated with low socioeconomic status in marriage.

3. The young homemaker with less than high school education does not recognize inadequate preparation for her role through in-school homemaking experiences.

4. The young homemaker with less than high school education is not oriented to traditional methods of Extension home economics programs.

SECURING THE POPULATION FOR THE STUDY

The study was based on female dropouts from the public school system of Burlington, Vermont, a city of 39,000; in the system there are two junior high schools made up of grades 7 through 9, and one senior high school of grades 10 through 12.

An original list of girls who left either junior or senior high school during the period January 1, 1960, through June 15, 1963, without completion of grade 12 was compiled from school records. (Until the school year 1962-63, reason for withdrawal was not a required entry on the permanent record. Therefore the original list may well include a certain number of girls who transferred to a parochial system or whose family moved from the area.)

There were 167 names on the original list.

When these 167 names were checked against the city clerk's marriage records for the period January 1, 1960, to September 1, 1963, it was found that 40 girls (24 percent) had married in this city.

An attempt was made to locate each of these 40 girls, using the city directory, tax records, telephone or personal calls to parents of both bride and groom, or a letter and return card sent to the last-known address with a forwarding request. Attempts to locate the girls gave these results:

Unable to make any contact	13
Moved out of state	6
Refused interview	1
Nearby town; interview obtained	4
Study town; interview obtained	16

The group of 20 girls with whom contact could be established was taken as the statistical population.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH SCHEDULE

The personal interview was selected as the most appropriate method, since —

1. A low verbal ability, with need for frequent interpretation, was assumed.

2. A lack of interest in completing and returning a mailed questionnaire was assumed.

3. It was assumed that the subject would be more willing to answer personal questions verbally than to commit them to writing.

4. It was assumed that the subject would be more willing to spend the necessary time to complete the interview in a face-to-face situation.

5. A personal interview would permit observation of the subject's home and neighborhood, and some functioning of the subject within that environment.

The interview schedule was partly structured (both questions and possible responses predetermined) for ease in administration and because of the assumed nonverbal characteristic of the group; and it was partly open-end (questions raised without providing or suggesting any structure for reply).

Questions included in the schedule were representative of items indicated as pertinent in a review of the literature; they were discussed with the chairman of the home economics department and with the state leader for the Extension home economics program.

The research schedule was pretested with one subject; when it was later given a second time, essentially the same responses were made. The instrument was therefore assumed to be reliable in respect to the responses it elicited.

The question schedule is in four parts:

1. Personal Data covers the facts of age, children, work, income, church, and other group relationships.

2. Present Management Practices attempts to uncover ways in which the family handles money, and the wife's attitudes about the family's spending pattern.

3. Personal Relationships provides information on the courtship period, the environment of both parental homes, and the degree of adjustment in her own marriage as evaluated by the wife.

The Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test (19) was included with the permission of the authors.

4. Evaluation of Educational Experiences attempts to uncover attitudes toward school and toward homemaking class experiences, to determine what the wife recalls studying in homemaking and how she evaluates this in terms of her present role, her reaction to out-of-school education, and her awareness of the Extension Service and its methods.

All of the questions were asked and replies recorded by the investigator, with the exception of the Locke-Wallace Test. (In that test, numbers 1, 7, and 8 required explanation rather consistently.)

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHEDULE

In each case an original call was made during the morning. At this time the project was explained as a "study of how much your homemaking classes have helped you." Assurance was given that the study was confidential and that the interests of the family would not be harmed. A time was arranged when conditions for the interview would be most convenient.

In nearly every case interviewing was done between 1 and 4 p.m.; all interviews were held during a three-week period in midwinter, for the sake of consistency in conditions that might affect family living. About one hour was required for each interview and the attendant amenities.

At the time of the interview a subjective notation was made regarding quality of housing and neighborhood, for the purpose of calculating social stratification. Details of the criteria appear in the Appendix.

Items of intelligence and achievement were taken from school records; marriage data came from the city clerk's files. The period between marriage

and birth of the first child could thus be computed without direct questioning, an apparently unnecessary delicacy on the part of the investigator, as each subject pointed out that she had been premaritally pregnant, if such were the case.

By far the greatest time was expended in actually locating the subjects. In many cases an address obtained from a reliable source only a short time before would prove to be an empty apartment with a For Rent sign in the window, or occupied by persons who could not or would not give any suggestion where the previous tenants might now be. In one case the subject of an interview was, when eventually tracked down, found to be living in the apartment where a previous subject had been interviewed two weeks before.

Almost as much backtracking was done to reach persons who were not at home, or who (on particularly frigid mornings) were not yet up. Only four of the subjects had telephones, so all calls were made in person.

A brief case history of each family was compiled immediately following the interview.

METHOD OF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

To show statistical relationships, a test of significance between the means was used. The sample was divided into two categories on the basis of Marriage Adjustment Scores -- 99 or less, and 100 or more. The significance of difference between the means was tested for each of four variables: difference in I.Q. of husband and wife, difference in grade achievement of husband and wife, premarital pregnancy, age of wife at marriage. The t-test was selected because of the small number of cases in the study -- 18 degrees of freedom. Significance was based on reference to Fisher's tables of t-values. (9)

POPULATION STUDIED

The Subculture

Throughout the study it became increasingly apparent that the study group represented, with only two exceptions, a persistent subculture in the community: the youthfully marrying school dropout was not leaving school because she did not conform to the norm, but for the very reason that she did. Within her socioeconomic stratum, a general devaluation of education exists. Her departure from school reflects, in large part, the value system of the home and neighborhood.

There is, in general, continuity from one generation to another. Parents, when contacted, knew where their children were and how they were doing. Parents were, in fact, providing a good deal of support in both tangible and intangible forms.

In most cases they expressed no disapproval or real concern at early termination of school or early marriage. Many school records, in fact, contained notes from parents -- some predating the actual leaving of school by several months -- giving permission, in some cases even urging, that their daughter should drop out of school.

This is quite within the value system.

The pertinacity of the problem of low education-low socioeconomic level is more understandable as it becomes clear that to break out of the pattern means the rejection of the value system of the originating culture rather than (as so often appears to professional educators) rejection of the school and the opportunity for self-betterment.

Characteristics of the Respondents

Age

The ages of wives at marriage ranged from 15 years 6 months to 18 years 3 months, with the mean age at marriage 17.1 years. The ages of husbands at marriage ranged from 17.0 years to 24.0 years, with a mean of 19.5 years.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES
BY AGE AT MARRIAGE

Age	Number of Wives	Number of Husbands
15 - 16	1	0
16 - 17	6	0
17 - 18	8	3
18 - 19	5	5
19 - 20	0	5
20 - 21	0	3
21 - 22	0	1
22 - 23	0	1
23 - 24	0	2

It is obvious that we are dealing here with the truly "youthful," the real "teen-age" marriage. The average age of wives is 3.2 years below the national average age of women at marriage (20.3 years). (30)

Pregnancy

Fifty percent of the wives in the study group were premaritally pregnant, as compared with the generally accepted figure of 20 percent in the

overall population . (8)

TABIE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF COUPLES BY MONTHS BETWEEN MARRIAGE AND BIRTH OF FIRST CHILD

Months	Couples
- 9	1
0 to 3	3
4, 5	3
6, 7	3
8, 9	0
10, 11	2
12 to 18	4
19 to 24	1

For premaritally pregnant wives, the mean number of months between marriage and birth was 4.0; if the case in which marriage followed birth by 9 months is included, the mean drops to 3.1 months.

For wives not pregnant at marriage, the mean number of months to birth of first child was 14.1.

The mean age at marriage of wives in the pregnancy-provoked marriages was 16.55 years, more than a year less than the mean age of wives not premaritally pregnant (17.6). The mean age of husbands in pregnancy-provoked marriages was 19.2; husbands of wives not premaritally pregnant had a mean age of 20.7 -- a difference of nearly a year and a half.

The mean age of all wives in the group at the birth of their first child was 17.6, of husbands 20.4. (Two marriages in which there had been no pregnancy, and one in which there had been a miscarriage, were excluded.)

The average number of pregnancies per couple (excluding the two who had never been pregnant) was 2.1; the average was 1.9 if all marriages were included. There had been a total of 38 pregnancies.

TABIE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF COUPIES BY NUMBER OF PREGNANCIES

Pregnancies	Couples
0	2
1	5
2	7
3	5
4	1

Health

Health problems listed by wives for themselves included one miscarriage, one general toxemia of pregnancy with renal involvement, menstrual irregularity following pelvic injury in auto accident, vaginal infection following delivery. One wife had very poor and uncorrected vision.

A large proportion of the wives obviously needed dental care, but this was not mentioned as a health problem by any.

Among the children, one infant was extremely premature, one had been (at the age of one month) hospitalized for four weeks for dysentery caused by poor sanitation, and one needed correction of a congenital eye defect.

Prenatal care had varied from six months to none, the latter case having no predelivery examination. The observation of Siegel (27) that prenatal care is a high priority need of teen-age mothers was borne out.

Hollingshead points out that people in low socioeconomic strata have less knowledge of illness and where to find help. (14) Rainwater indicates that doctors and nurses often find it difficult to understand why these people do not exhibit the same sophistication toward medical care that middle-class people show. (24)

Several wives expressed negative attitudes toward clinics for either themselves or their babies, saying, "You have to wait all day"; "The doctors and nurses just stand around and drink coffee and talk to each other and let you wait." One wife expressed great animosity toward the public health nurse who visits the home once a week. She boasted that, "Some day I'm going to tell that snoop to keep out of my house."

Formal Education

The mean grade level achieved was 9.25 by wives, 9.40 by husbands. However, the median for both husbands and wives was less than completion of grade 9. Distribution of grade completion is shown in Table 4.

TABIE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES
BY GRADE IEVEL COMPLETED

Grade	Wives	Husbands
4	0	1
7	0	1
8	4	5
9	8	5
10	7	2
11	1	1
12	0	4
1 yr. college	0	1

By their own evaluation, reasons for leaving school were:

TABIE 5

DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS CITED
FOR LEAVING SCHOOL

Reason	Number
Pregnant	8
Didn't like school	7
To get married	3
Not doing well	1
Already married, became pregnant	1

A review of grades received and records of conferences with teachers and guidance personnel indicates that, in general, "didn't like school" and "not doing well" could also be applied to cases in which "to get married" or "pregnancy" was given as the primary reason. The highest academic record in the group belonged to the girl who married, planning to complete high school, and then became pregnant.

The pattern of generally low to low-normal intelligence was frequently associated with repetition of one or more school grades. Academic performance was low, with generally poor motivation, irregular attendance, low achievement scores, and little or no intellectual curiosity. Guidance records cite short attention span, problems in reading and comprehension, behavior difficulties. There was little or no participation in co-curricular activities, no leadership in either classroom or extra-class situations. Maladjustment to the school situation manifested itself in either passivity or antisocial behavior.

All of these observations are in keeping with those of Burchinal, Inselberg, Havighurst, Garner and Perry, Moss and Gingles in the works previously cited.

During the interviews, in response to the question "If you had not married young, what do you think you might have done?" more than half could make no definite reply, answering, "I don't know," "Nothing, I guess," "I only wanted to get married." Two said they would have liked to be hairdressers, three said secretaries (although only one of these had been following a commercial course). Two spoke of owning horses and one (with an I.Q. of 83) said she had planned, until becoming pregnant at the age of 15, to be "a lady doctor."

But for most there was no real belief that their future would hold anything except marriage. A career in the sense of education for work, and gainful employment outside the home, was not a part of the cultural pattern. As Rainwater says, "These women have always known that their reason for existence is to be wives and mothers...."(24)

The critical years for leaving school appear to be grades 8 through 10, during which the potential school dropout becomes legally eligible to leave school, either by attaining age 16, or by completing grade 8. Any subject matter considered essential for the student who will marry young, and terminate formal education, will most likely never reach her if it is deferred beyond grade 9.

Those who are concerned with education for family living do not, in the short period in which such a student is within their reach, have much time.

Intelligence

There was an extremely wide range in intelligence among the young men and women in the group studied -- from a low of 75 (Stanford-Binet or equivalent) to a high of 120 among the wives, and from 55 to 115 among the husbands. (In the four cases in which intelligence scores for husbands were not available, estimates were made based on grade attainment, type of employment, and comments of teachers and guidance personnel.)

The mean I.Q. among wives was 91.5. The mean I.Q. among husbands was 91.1. If the extremely low score of 55 for one husband was disregarded, the mean score for husbands rose to 94.6. Alignment of husband-wife scores is shown in Table 9.

Socioeconomic Status

The Hollingshead criteria (14) classify families in five categories, ranging from a high of Class I to a low of Class V. In the present study, socioeconomic classification under the Hollingshead criteria places nine couples in Class V, eight couples in Class IV, and three couples in Class

III. Of the eleven couples above Class V, eight wives had married husbands two full years or more older than themselves; of the nine wives in Class V, six had married husbands less than two years older.

Without exception, marriages in which wives had attained grade level equal to or higher than their husbands' fell in Class V. There were no Class V rankings among couples in which the husband's grade level surpassed, by even one year, his wife's.

It is difficult to visualize much upward mobility, (judgment of class position being based on education, occupation, and quality of housing), for the family whose head is limited in education and shows little aspiration for more, whose job opportunities are limited or nonexistent, and whose housing is determined by a generally marginal income.

Religion

In 14 of the 20 marriages, both husband and wife were at least nominal Catholics; among these couples, in 11 marriages neither husband nor wife attended church with any regularity. In the three remaining, the wife attended church regularly, but only one husband did so.

There was only one couple in the study group in which both husband and wife were Protestant. This couple was most active of any in participation in church services and church-related activities. The husband attended a small midwestern evangelical college for one year, and is continuing to read with their pastor to prepare himself to be a "preacher."

Five marriages were interfaith; in these two wives, but no husbands, attend church regularly.

It would appear that the level of religiosity is very low in the study group, and that church orientation would be a most unrealistic peg on which to hang a program for young homemakers.

Memberships and Activities

Only one couple (both husband and wife Protestant) report any church-affiliated activity other than Sunday service.

Among the 20 husbands, only four belong to any organization whatsoever: one to a Rod and Gun Club, one to the Eagles Club, one to the American Legion, and one attends National Guard drills.

No wife is a member of any organization whatsoever.

In response to the question on social activities, dancing and visiting relatives were each mentioned six times, movies and bowling three times each, and one notation each for cards, bingo, roller skating, having company in, stock car races, and church groups. Most of the social activities reported involved husband and wife as a couple, with the exception of one wife who reported going regularly to Legion Club dances with her mother. Rainwater explores the subject of nonmembership at some length. (24)

Spare-Time Activities

"Visiting with friends" was much the most popular response to the question "What do you most enjoy doing in your spare time?" The 20 replies were distributed as follows: visiting with friends 10, visiting with relatives 3, cooking special foods 3, shopping 2, playing with children 2.

There is almost complete absence of any participation, as couples, in any organizational activity in the community; no wife expressed any feeling of deprivation in not belonging to organizations, or any hope or expectation of membership when money might be available, or when the children would be older. For the wives, organizations did not seem to exist in their normative world. The social or service organization does not, then, offer a starting point for reaching out-of-school homemakers.

By their own evaluation, eight wives read little, six read a fair amount, and six a good deal. As to purpose, twelve said that they read for pleasure only, four for information as well, and four could not specify.

Of the four who said they read to a degree for information, all were able to mention by name several women's magazines which they saw from time to time, although none were observed in their homes. A daily paper is seen by more than half the wives, but only five subscribe to it themselves. Other information sources mentioned were "Dr. Spock" and cookbooks.

In two cases, the investigator was shown a few dog-eared ditto sheets of recipes kept from junior high school homemaking classes; accompanying remarks were: "This is my cookbook," and "I know how to do these and a cookbook would be harder."

In three houses books were in evidence; in every case they were almost entirely sets of stories (mystery, career girl, or horse stories) written expressly for the young adolescent or preadolescent girl. In one home a few of the husband's high school textbooks were jumbled in among them; but for the most part, homes appeared to be devoid of reading matter.

Television viewing habits stretched along a continuum from the wife who said she never watches television (they do not own a set) to the wife who said that the first thing she does in the morning is to turn on the TV, and the last thing she does at night is to turn it off. Television was not mentioned spontaneously in any case as a source of information. When questioned further, those who did think it might be possible to find "a little" information on TV mentioned two foods programs (one, commercial foods

demonstrations and one, an irregularly scheduled Extension program) and commercials in general, as sources.

As to their favorite kind of TV program, eight mentioned comedies, seven daytime serials, five Westerns, three variety shows, two hillbilly music, and one each war stories and quiz shows.

(Hollingshead points out that "Class I and Class V differ from the others primarily in not participating as much in exposures to the mass media. Class II, and to some extent Class III, put greater emphasis on magazines and radio than TV. TV tends to dominate Class IV.") (14)

Dating

The 20 wives reported age at first date as ranging from 11 to 16; the mean age at which dating was begun was a little over 13 years, with 13.2 the mean age for those in pregnancy-provoked marriages and 13.6 for the remaining 10. Early heterosexuality did not appear to be the product of the "social little league" sometimes fostered by middle-class families, but rather normative within the value system.

Parents

Among parental families, there were four divorces, two deaths among husbands' parents; there were four divorces and four deaths among wives' parents. In two of the marriages, daughters of divorced parents married sons of divorced parents. The mean age at marriage of mothers of girls who were pregnant premaritally was 18.3; the mean age of mothers of girls not premaritally pregnant was 21.2. The difference in age at marriage between mothers and daughters bears out the generally observed social trend of a lowering of the average age at marriage.

These observations make up the profile of the potential early-marrying school dropout. Notations on a significant number of permanent school records indicate that she can be, and is, recognized by both teachers and guidance personnel rather early and with considerable accuracy.

There is considerably less surety that, having been identified, she will find educational offerings adapted to her abilities and needs. This is as true in the area of home economics as in any other classes. The subject matter and the methods by which it is taught continue to have middle-class orientations, with little regard indicated for the way the student actually lives, or the problems inherent in her soon-to-be-assumed role of wife and mother.

FINDINGS

Present Management Practices

As families, most of these youthfully marrying couples are not doing very well financially. Unemployment is high (frequently uncompensated because of conditions of previous employment) and income among those who have jobs is low.

TABLE 6

DISTRIBUTION OF HUSBANDS
BY CURRENT EARNINGS

Income	Number
$0	4
$28	2
$45	1
$60-65	3
$66-75	3
$76-85	3
$86-95	2
$100	1
No response	1

The mean income of the 14 employed husbands was $71.57 per week, with a range of $45 to $100. The two husbands "earning" $28 each were receiving unemployment compensation. One wife reported that she had no idea how much her husband earned, and had never known. The mean income for the entire 20 families was $50.37 per week.

The latter figure includes the earnings of the one wife who is regularly employed outside the home; she earns about $45 a week as a waitress; her husband is unemployed and of such low mentality as to make any future employment doubtful.

One other wife waits on table for special parties at a men's club about once a month, and one wife does part-time work mounting color slides in her home, but their contribution to the family income is negligible.

It is foreign to the pattern for the wife to work outside the home. She is busy with infants, and has little education or training to offer in the labor market.

In terms of present occupation, or that cited as "usual" in the case of unemployed husbands, employment was on the following levels as indicated on the Hollingshead scale: (14)

TABLE 7

DISTRIBUTION OF HUSBANDS BY OCCUPATION CLASS

Class	Number
7	6
6	2
5	7
4	3
3	2

Eleven wives considered their present income adequate. Of the eight wives who considered their present income less than adequate, six had unemployed husbands and two had husbands who had previously held better jobs that paid $25 to $35 more per week than they were now earning. One wife, who did not know her husband's salary and handled no money, was unable to say whether present income was adequate or not.

If it were not for considerable help from parents, several of the young families would be economically submerged; as it is they carry a good deal of debt, a significent portion of which is for cash borrowed from small-loan companies.

Assets and Liabilities

In regard to assets now, compared with assets at the time of marriage, 16 wives felt that assets had increased; four felt that they had decreased. As to debts, 16 also said that they were now greater, while four stated that they were less.

Among the 20 families were listed:

20 open installment accounts
19 open charge accounts
8 current cash loans (finance companies).

Of the 20 wives, 18 stated that the availability of credit not not affect their buying.

As to tangible assets, possession of items on the checklist appeared in the following order and frequency:

Transistor radio	20
Television	17
Record player	14
Camera	14
Mixer	13
Car	11
Hair dryer	11
Washer (nonautomatic)	10
Electric or gas range	10
Automatic washer	4
Telephone	4
Sewing machine	4
Movie camera	2
Blender	1
Dryer	0

When asked the next item they would like to buy, replies were as follows:

Automatic washer	4
House	4
Youth bed	2
Refrigerator-freezer	2
All new furniture	1
Bedroom set	1
Washer (any kind)	1
Dryer	1
Hair dryer	1
Stereo TV	1
Personal TV	1
Color TV	1

It appears that actual purchases early in these marriages are largely centered about items from which the husband as well as the wife derives satisfaction; "next purchase" is more representative of the wife's own wishes, and centers about more and better functional equipment for the home. This is scarcely surprising in view of the fact that the home marks, to a large degree, the boundaries of the young wife's world. As Rainwater points out, the satisfactions which she feels are in her daily occupation as wife and mother. (24)

One way in which the young wife, facing a real and often stark existence, tries to alleviate some of its less pleasant aspects, is by "prettying up" her home. Artificial flowers, bric-a-brac, elaborately veneer-inlaid bedroom sets all help to deny her problems. So too do a cabinet television, a record player, and the new personal status symbol--the hair dryer. She worries a good deal about debt, but the need to acquire possessions which deny her problems and offer visible assurance of security is greater than the need to be financially solvent. (24)

Nearly all of the debt carried by the families in the study represents furniture and appliances for the home (with the exception of cash loans which were mainly for hospital bills). Without exception, the next item they hoped to buy was more of the same. There was no mention of any anticipated expenditure for education or personal improvement.

Two families interviewed said that they had no current debts whatever for furniture. One managed deliberately by using secondhand pieces "until the children are big enough not to ruin everything," while the other couple (without children) had bought new furniture for their entire apartment with the windfall of an insurance settlement for an automobile accident just before their wedding.

Nine families had savings accounts — seven containing less than $100, two with $100 or more. Eleven families had no savings whatsoever.

Four families carried no insurance of any kind, one had a hospitilization policy only. In three families the husband's life was insured (with policies of $1,000, $2,000, and $10,000 respectively). In 12 families, all members of the family had life insurance, including the youngest infant in the family; in five of these neither the type of policy nor face value was known by the wife. In two of these families, the birth of at least one child had been paid for by a city welfare agency, but new parenthood had apparently been unable to withstand salesmanship based on sentiment. In the family in which furniture had been paid for by windfall, neither husband nor wife has either life or health insurance in any form, although the husband is employed at what the wife calls "a comfortable wage." She said that the first kind of insurance they hope to buy is fire insurance on their furniture.

Management of Money

Within the 20 households, 14 wives handle all the money, with husbands turning over their pay as received. In three homes the husband handles all the money, and in three the money is divided. In two of the latter there is no apparent agreement on areas of responsibility. Rainwater suggests that, in general, wives seem to feel that "earning the money is the husband's responsibility; spending it wisely is the woman's duty." (24)

Even in those cases where financial control is not unilateral, there seems to be little joint decision-making. One wife, who has no part in handling the family money, characterized a friend's marriage thus: "She's got it made. Her husband gives her charge accounts all over town."

But in general, wives appear to take a good deal of pride in spreading the money thinly enough to accomplish a good share of what they expect of it. Eleven wives keep records of expenditures in the form of bills and receipts only; three keep a notebook with more or less regularity; one uses a checkbook only; five keep no records whatsoever. Two families (the same two which have savings accounts of $100 or more) have checking accounts; all others pay bills by cash or money order.

Parental Families

Ten wives reported that their families were pleased at their marriage; of these, three were pregnancy-provoked. The families of 10 girls were not pleased at their marriage; of these, seven were pregnancy-provoked. Fourteen reported that their husband's family was pleased; of these, eight were premaritally pregnant. In the six marriages which did not please husbands' families, two wives were premaritally pregnant.

Conflict with in-laws (usually mother-in-law) was reported by seven wives, with areas of conflict varying considerably -- ways of bringing up children, brother-in-law's wife's jealousy, religion, husband married "above him," mother-in-law's "old-fashioned ideas," baby's dark complexion when father is light.

As to relations with their own families, 10 wives reported improvement, eight had remained the same, and two deteriorated following marriage.

Number of Children Desired

No wife interviewed wished to be without children, but the wives varied in the number they thought ideal.

TABLE 8

DISTRIBUTION OF WIVES BY NUMBER OF CHILDREN DESIRED

Children desired	Wives
2	5
3	4
4	8
5	2
6	1

The mean number desired was 3.5 children; this is within the consensus figure for the general population in America, which is two to four. (Freedman points out that this consensus which exists among the different social strata is surprisingly great.) (10)

On the question of ideal family size, 13 wives felt that their husbands agreed with them, seven that they did not. Only three expressed difficulty in reconciling contraception with religious teaching. Each of these three mentioned that she could take "the pill" for six months following delivery of each child, but that she wasn't sure that it was "right," or that she worried that it might be so "strong" as to impair health.

Eight wives said that their husbands absolutely refused to cooperate in obtaining or using any form of contraceptive, citing the husband's objections as being "for personal reasons" or "interference with pleasure." Rainwater says, of this "Do-Nothing" group, "Such a clearcut insistence seems more characteristic of men than women." (25) Contraception, 15 wives felt, should be their own responsibility; five felt it should be the husband's.

Sex Education

Provision of information about sex was the only area in which they felt that, in general, there would be a marked difference between their children's upbringing and their own; six wives expressed open resentment at the lack of sex instruction provided by their mothers.

Clearly there is considerable room for earlier and better sex instruction for boys as well, and for the inculcation of a sense of responsibility for their own power of procreation. As Kinsey pointed out, contrary to popularly held opinion, sex relations are not more frequent among people of the lower socioeconomic classes, but they are "underprivileged" in terms of sexual knowledge. (18)

Responsibilities

A discussion of the responsibilities of a wife and mother showed overwhelming response in the area of physical care of the children (mentioned by 14) and care of the home (mentioned by eight). Wives spoke often of wanting to "make a nice home for my husband." When elaboration was sought, a "nice home" was described mostly in terms of scrubbed floors, clean underwear, and meals on time.

A husband and father's primary responsibility, as seen by 18 wives, is to earn money. Only one wife said that while it is important that a man work, it is also important that he find satisfactions of his own in his work. All wives could tell where their husband worked, and the general nature of the business, but few could describe the job in any detail. They seemed somewhat surprised, in fact, to be asked to think much about the hours that he spends away from home.

As other responsibilities of husbands and fathers, moral training and love were mentioned four times each; noted twice was "remain with the family," and once each were patience, help with the children, "being good to us."

Goals

Little differentiation in response was made between "family goals" and "personal goals." Under family goals, wives mentioned owning their own home (eight times), stay together, education for children, get children grown up (three times each), happiness, good moral training for family, husband have job (twice each). In answer to the query on personal goals, they mentioned happiness (five times), be a good wife, be a good mother (four times each), and health, work with horses, never pregnant again, Christian life, unable to think of any (once each).

There was no mention of security as a goal, in terms of planning for later life. This period of the family cycle, as a matter of fact, was acknowledged only in two brief references to social security, indicative that the government program would provide for all their needs when they were 65.

No mention was made, either, of saving or otherwise providing for their children's education, although many said that they hoped their children would be better educated than they themselves were. The rather wistful dreams they have for their children, dreams of education and well-paying jobs, appear likely never to develop beyond the dream level.

In the wives' three unrestricted wishes, it was assumed that the wish mentioned first was of uppermost importance. Wishes were mentioned with the following frequency:

First Wish

Own our own home	8
Job, or better job, for husband	5
Out of debt	1
Health of husband	1
Happiness of children	1
Be a hairdresser	1
Take in orphans	1
Never pregnant again	1

Second Wish

Job, or better job, for husband	6
Own home	4
Debts paid	2
Dryer	1
New car	1
Education for children	1
No suffering or hard times	1
No worries	1
Own a horse	1
No baby for a few years	1
No baby next year	1

Third Wish

Be happy	5
Good health	3
Own home	2
New furniture	2
Debts paid	1
Be a hairdresser	1
New washer	1
Education for husband	1
Not have children so fast	1
Not have children for two years	1
Husband have "operation" (vasectomy)	1

Owning their own home was a major goal, appearing both as the top item in "family goals" and as the top item in "first wish," second most frequent in "second wish," and third most frequent in "third wish." It was mentioned as a major goal in one of these categories by 18 of the 20 wives.

Rainwater suggests that "a home of our own" represents freedom from tyrannical landlords, from fear of rent being raised or, perhaps most important, represents "long strides on the way to stability, away from the brink of financial chaos." (24) Yet private ownership of a home is, according to Harrington, "one of the great myths of American life," for the income of most of these families is well below that generally recognized as the minimum required before a family can think seriously of buying a home. (12)

Marriage Adjustment

Locke (19) says that marital adjustment ranges along a continuum from very great to very little adjustment; happiness in marriage, as judged by an outsider, represents adjustment, and divorce represents maladjustment.*

The range of mean scores cited by the authors of the Locke-Wallace Marriage Adjustment Test is from 71.7 for those known to be maladjusted to 135.9 for those exceptionally well adjusted. In the 20 marriages in this study, scores ranged from a low of 72 to a high of 156. Possible scores range from 2 to 159.

Six scores in the study group formed a low cluster (72 to 95). While not all of the pregnancy-provoked marriages were in this low range, five of the six scores below 100 were for marriages in which premarital pregnancy was a factor. All marriages with a score below 100 were in Class V socio-economic classification. In five of the six low-scoring marriages, grade

* There were no divorced persons in the 20 couples studied, although in tracing the original group of 40 girls it was determined that three of these had been divorced, one of them twice. Two of the three were living in another state; the third could not be traced.

attainment of the husband was lower than that of the wife. In each case in which the score was below 100, there was a difference of at least 10 points in the intelligence of husband and wife; in five of the six cases the husband was of considerably lower intelligence. The mean age at marriage of wives scoring below 100 was 16.5, considerably below the mean of 17.1 for the entire group and 17.5 for the wives scoring 100 or over.

In terms of the Locke-Wallace means, the well-adjusted group scored high. Several possible explanations suggest themselves. First, a "honeymoon aura" may still color the score in these marriages, none of which is yet four years old. Second, there may be a defensive response to the investigator's unknown and possibly critical attitude toward youthful marriages. Third, there may be relatively low expectancy for happiness and adjustment. And fourth, as a group these wives are not accustomed to evaluating intangibles, particularly relationships in which they themselves are involved and for whose appearance of success or failure they have a responsibility. In any case, the comment of its authors that the Locke-Wallace Test is most applicable to the middle class is reinforced, and it would appear that more work should be done in testing the validity of scores of a lower socioeconomic group.

Statistical correlations were made of the Marriage Adjustment Score in relation to (1) difference between I.Q. of husband and wife, (2) difference in grade attainment of husband and wife, (3) age of wife at marriage, and (4) the factor of premarital pregnancy. The data used in the correlations appear in Tables 9 and 10.

The factors of difference in intelligence and in grade achievement were not found to be significant (at least within this small population). The factor of pregnancy provocation, however, was found to be significant at the .90 level, and that of age of wife at marriage at the .99 level. The latter bears out the suggestion of Moss and Gingles that age of wife at marriage may be emerging as a significant factor in stability of marriage. (23)

There appeared to be no relationship between income and Marriage Adjustment Score. As Hollis points out, while severe economic pressure can contribute to conflict, there is no evidence that this appears in isolation; economic hardship only adds to other factors weakening the marriage. (15)

TABLE 9

PERSONAL DATA CONCERNING THE POPULATION

Case	Age W at marriage	Preg. prov.	Marr. Adj. Score	H's IQ	W's IQ	H grade level	W grade level	Socioec. class
1	17 yr 9 mo		135	105	102	12	10	IV
2	17 2		123	(100)	90	12	9	IV
3	16 6	*	85	72	92	8	10	V
4	17 10		133	(100)	76	12	10	III
5	17 -	*	138	108	105	9	10	V
6	16 3	*	83	72	83	8	8	V
7	18 -		156	(90)	85	10	9	IV
8	16 3	*	95	102	80	8	8	V
9	17 4	*	140	91	98	7	9	V
10	15 6	*	84	105	75	11	8	IV

11	17 3	*	117	76	84	9	10	V
12	16 3		129	87	92	8	11	V
13	16 1		100	115	120	12	10	III
14	18 3		131	87	99	9	9	IV
15	16 3	*	72	78	89	9	9	V
16	18 -	*	135	82	75	8	9	V
17	18 -		145	95	93	10	9	IV
18	18 3		156	(110)	105	13	10	III
19	17 6		80	55	92	4	9	V
20	17 2	*	136	93	85	9	8	IV

( ) estimated

TABLE 10

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARRIAGE ADJUSTMENT SCORE AND FOUR VARIABLE FACTORS

Factor	N	Sum	Sum of Sq.	Average	t-value	Signif.
Difference between I.Q. of husband and wife	(MAS less than 100) 6	-27	3395	-4.50	-.8730	.60
	(MAS more than 99) 14	30	1168	2.14		
Difference between grade achievement of husband and wife	(MAS less than 100 6	-4	38	-.66	-1.1282	.70
	(MAS more than 99) 14	7	49	.50		
Pregnancy provocation	(Preg. prov.) 10	1085	124433	108.50	-1.7760	.90
	(Not preg.) 10	1288	170942	128.80		
Age of wife	(MAS less than 100) 6	1179	231975	196.50	-3.2628	.99
	(MAS more than 99) 14	2932	614930	209.42		

Education for Homemaking

In School

Girls who can be identified as potential dropouts are, in general, poor in academic orientation. They are frequently low in ability, even more often low in achievement, doing a minimum of work (or less) in the general classes to which they are assigned. It is the common pattern for them to be placed in homemaking classes when they appear unable to cope with more academic work.

Superficially, they would seem to have had more exposure to education in homemaking than in many other subject areas, since the records show an average of nearly two years of homemaking for each of the girls in the study.

In many cases, girls were unable to recollect in which grades they had taken homemaking. They had even more difficulty in remembering subject areas offered at different grade levels.

School records in the study city show that homemaking was a required subject for all girls in grade seven in public schools. One of the two junior high schools found it necessary, because of large enrollment and limited facilities and staff, to offer homemaking to each girl for half a year only in grade seven. In that same school, homemaking was required for the top three divisions in grade eight; in the other junior high it was elective in grade eight, and chosen by very few students in the upper half of the class. Homemaking was offered as an elective in grades nine and ten and taken, in general, by low-ranking students only.

No girl interviewed had had more than two years of homemaking. Twelve had had two "years" (one of which might actually have been a half-year), seven had had one year, and one girl (a transfer) had had only one-half year of homemaking. All classes were about 45 minutes long.

In grade 7, twelve girls had actually taken one-half year of homemaking, five had taken a full year, and three had taken none.

In grade 8, four girls had taken homemaking.

In grade 9, ten girls had taken homemaking.

In grade 10, three girls had taken homemaking for a full year, one for one-half year.

When computed in terms of classroom meetings, based on a generous maximum of 36 school weeks per year, the mean number of classroom meetings per girl over the entire four-year span of grades 7 through 10 was 123.3 meetings.

In other words, during the entire four years in which she might have been reached with homemaking information and education for family living, the average girl received only about 80 percent of the classtime in homemaking that would be devoted to one year of any other subject.

It appears unlikely, even impossible, that a naturally unmotivated student could be effectively motivated, and that student-teacher rapport could be built up to the point where education in sensitive and critical areas could be achieved, on the basis of as little consistent contact as this. Moreover, all the problems inherent in low scholastic ability -- short attention span, poor carryover, and low level of participation -- are intensified where student-teacher contact is not regular and frequent.

Students experienced considerable difficulty in recalling the subject areas studied in various years. For grade 7, food preparation was mentioned nine times and clothing construction six times; for grade 8, clothing construction was mentioned eight times, food preparation six times, and child care (baby-sitting) five times; for grade 9, clothing construction and food preparation were each mentioned thirteen times, health and home nursing ten times; for grade 10, clothing construction and food preparation three times each.

There was no way of determining whether these areas were recalled because they involved physical activity, or because these areas made up the scope of the material offered; it is reasonable to assume that both factors were operative.

Respondents were asked to "think back to the year you were in seventh grade, and what you studied in homemaking. In terms of what you have discovered you need to know in your job as a wife (wife and mother), would you say that what you learned in each of the following subject areas has given you much help, a fair amount of help, or no help?" The question was repeated for the remaining grades through 10.

The subject areas named by the investigator were: child care and development; clothing and personal care; food preparation; health, safety, and home nursing; housing and home furnishings; money management and consumer education; personal and family relations.

In the case of child care and development, more than half the respondents referred to its being taught as "baby-sitting"; again the orientation was to another socioeconomic group than theirs.

In every case, if an item was remembered at all, the chance was two to one that it would be placed in the "great help" or "fair help" column.

The reliability of recollection, however, is seriously open to question. For example, only four girls had taken any homemaking in grade 10, yet 13 "remembered" that work in food preparation in grade 10 had been helpful to them in varying degrees. Moreover, clothing construction was remembered as among the most "helpful" subjects studied. Yet no girl had made a garment of any kind, for herself or children, since leaving school, and only two said that they used the sewing machine in doing simple household mending.

It must be concluded that students recalled most readily those subjects in which there had been active physical participation, but that the simple fact of remembering a subject area did not guarantee carry-over into home use.

The skills which the homemakers were most conscious of having had to develop after marriage were cooking and meal planning (mentioned by 11), child care and development (10), and money management (4). Most of their help, they felt, had come from their mothers and from making their own mistakes. The skills they mentioned most often as being those which had to be developed after marriage were in the subject areas in homemaking classes that they had considered most helpful.

Extension Home Economics

Without exception, all 20 young homemakers gave negative answers to questions concerning knowledge of "Extension" or "Home Demonstration" programs or activities. More than half of the group thought that "Home Demonstration" might have to do with the demonstration of products, such as plastics and jewelry, in the home at neighborhood parties where orders would be taken. They did not know who the Home Demonstration Agent was, nor what she was.

When asked whether they had ever heard of "Across the Fence", 15 could identify it as a television program, but only two said they ever watched it. These two were able to specify the time of day when it was aired, and general subject areas they had seen. The remaining 13 could not tell the time of day it could be seen, and many referred to it as being "for farmers," "not anything that I'd care about."

No homemaker said she sent for publications from any source, even when they were free, nor did anyone feel that the daily paper contained much information that would be helpful in her daily job of homemaking.

It must be concluded that the Extension program, in its present form, is virtually unknown to and totally ineffective with this group of young homemakers.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Not enough is yet known about the marriage-oriented, low-achieving student.

It is possible, in a significant number of cases, to identify the female marriage-oriented potential school dropout: her profile includes low to low-average intelligence, poor achievement scores, low grades, poor attendance record, lack of motivation, absence of participation in co-curricular activities. She probably began dating rather early, and has little future orientation in regard to work outside the home. She expects

to be a wife and mother, and this expectation is strengthened by the fact that this is the norm in the value system in which she lives. She will most likely leave school before completion of grade 10, and there is a greater than normal chance that she will be premaritally pregnant.

In some cases, depending on her own maturity, and the maturity and earning capacity of her husband, she may achieve in marriage and motherhood far greater success than she did in the milieu of the school.

In other cases, and these are in the majority, she faces problems of low income and unemployment, poor housing and home environment for her children, debt, less than adequate medical care, too frequent pregnancy, and a low level of marriage adjustment. Moreover, belief that the future will be significantly better and aspiration for improvement through personal effort are conspicuously lacking.

As yet, she is not being realistically prepared for her life role by the experiences offered to her in homemaking classes while she is in school, nor is she being reached effectively by an Extension home economics program once she is out of school.

Her outstanding needs are for education in the areas of child care and development, prenatal care, sex information, and meal preparation. The fact that, in marriage, she is likely to achieve a low socioeconomic status intensifies her needs: she has less money to seek help, and the very characteristics of her class make it unlikely that she will know sources of help in the community or seek them out independently.

The famous solution to all problems — educate the poor — loses its meaning when the subject feels little need for education, and the teacher has little knowledge of how to teach the poor effectively.

Implications for In-School Homemaking Education

The school carries a prime responsibility, in that it is probably the first and last social organization, apart from the family, with which these girls have continuing contact for a considerable period of time. It is within the school that the potential dropout can be identified. It is within the school that two to three years are available during which education for family living can be offered under controlled conditions. It is within the school situation that the groundwork can be laid on which continuing out-of-school contacts may be built.

The fact that the early-marrying school dropout can be identified with considerable accuracy should constitute a point of departure for a program that will meet her needs. But the decisive moment comes, not when she is identified, but when a decision is made as to how she shall be taught. It is here that middle-class orientations begin to widen the gap that already exists between educational needs and the educational offerings expected to meet these needs.

Course content in homemaking classes for grades 7 through 10 should be scrupulously evaluated in terms of its relationship to the actual needs of young wives and mothers of limited education and low income.

Professional biases are observable in every area of homemaking education.

A teacher may approach the subject of child care and development as "Now some of you are old enough to earn money as baby sitters" even though her class may be made up, at least in part, of girls at that very moment premaritally pregnant. But she is reflecting a bias that makes it nearly impossible for her to admit such conditions can and do exist.

The teacher who sews well herself and enjoys teaching sewing may lead a group of potential school dropouts to spend on clothing construction half of the total hours available for education in family living. But she is exhibiting a bias which says that it is nicer to be the kind of girl who makes her own clothes than the kind of girl who is a wife and mother at age 17.

The teacher who dismisses as "impossible to teach" the girls who cannot or will not learn the scientific whys of nutrition is truly throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

The fact must be faced that work with the low achiever, the girl with poor motivation, is hard and frequently frustrating. It is not everyone's forte; not only must the teacher possess competency in the required skills, but she must have as well the ability and patience and concern to develop similar competencies in her students.

Part of the dilemma in which today's homemaking teacher finds herself arises from the fact that she has been urged from every side to upgrade her subject matter. She has been directed to teach the whys (principles) as well as the hows (skills), and to protect her academic respectability and the inviolability of homemaking's place in the curriculum by making the material challenging to the academically talented student. In an effort to please everybody, she may end by effectively serving nobody.

Where enrollment is sufficient, consideration should be given to homogenous grouping in homemaking classes of students who approach the profile of the potential dropout. Grouping on other than grade level might make this feasible in smaller schools. Class meetings should be daily, to reinforce motivation, retention, and rapport. Homogenous grouping not only makes unity possible in methods of teaching, but the approach to subject matter can be far more direct and realistic. "When you are married" and "When you are taking care of your baby" are more meaningful to girls in this group than "Now that you are old enough to baby sit."

Subject areas in which there is opportunity for participation and activity are remembered to a greater degree. Opportunity should be given for individual experience and practice for, as one young homemaker pointed out, "We never did anything except in groups of four — and I keep house all by myself."

The mundanities of housing, shopping, feeding the family, spending the family's money — these need to be invested with reality and appeal for the girl who, without any experience at earning and managing, will take over the role of chief comptroller.

All of the traditional skills need to be considered and evaluated in terms of the actual conditions under which students will be managing a home. In a rural setting, for example, canning and other home methods of food preservation may be important — but this can no longer be assumed to be true. The use of government surplus commodities in meal preparation should be taught in proportion as it does or does not figure in the lives of the students. In any case, skill in reading, interpreting, and following directions will be applicable no matter what the trend of meal patterns in their lives.

Prenatal care has been shown to be a high priority need of teen-age wives; homogenously grouped classes offer an opportunity not only to make clear the importance of maternal and child health, but to introduce the agencies through which such care may be obtained in the community. Much fear and reluctance to seek help could be dissipated through field trips to clinics, sample prenatal classes, and well-baby agencies. Probably no single area offers a better chance, through physical care and information, to make a beginning toward favorably influencing the whole cycle of living.

In view of the limited number of resources for information available in the home, homemaking classes could build up a sound and understandable set of reference materials with whose contents the student would be familiar through classroom work.

Certainly the subject areas highest in priority should be taught in grades seven through nine, after which the ranks of "potential" dropouts thin rather rapidly. Depth and detail, and subject areas offering creative satisfactions, may be added for those girls who remain in school.

The objectives of a preterminal homemaking class should be wholly clear to administration, faculty, and guidance personnel. Their help is essential not only in organizing and scheduling, but in identifying and referring students, and in setting and maintaining a desirable climate toward the class within the school.

Implications For Extension Home Economics Programs

Those responsible for Extension home economics programs are similarly urged to review content, materials, and methods so as to bring some part of the Extension program in line with the characteristics of this heretofore unseen clientele.

The young homemaker of low socioeconomic and educational background is not oriented to any of the traditional lines of Extension communication. She does not read much, nor watch television for purposes of information or

improvement of skill. She does not belong to groups. Group membership is not a part of her cultural pattern nor, indeed, is out-of-school education of any kind. In working effectively with this clientele, Extension home economists must be ready to break out of their traditional patterns. They must be alive to the recognition or creation of opportunities to meet homemakers in the security of their own environment.

First, working in cooperation with homemaking teachers, community Extension home economists should routinely be introduced to girls in grades seven, eight, and nine, and given a chance to make clear the kinds of help they can offer to out-of-school families. A perfunctory introduction will not be remembered; a stimulating demonstration may -- particularly if it is in the spirit of "this is the kind of thing we could get together outside of school to do too." A return visit each year would reinforce the basis for a later working relationship.

The Extension home economist could also provide, adapting where necessary, many of the references that might constitute a home library for the girl when she is in her own home, where resources are few.

Second, a system might be established whereby the school guidance office routinely informs the Extension home economist of girls who are leaving school, particularly if marriage seems to figure in the student's immediate plans. Such referrals might form the nucleus of a new mailing list of especially adapted materials, notices of special television programs, and newsletters for young homemakers and mothers.

Third, since these girls do not lack friends among their peers and relatives, a page might successfully be taken from the book of those who have a commercial product rather than education to sell. Kitchen parties, on much the same basis as the familiar "plastics parties," are a possibility.

Formal organization should be avoided. It has threatening overtones for this group, whose members have developed few, if any, qualities of leadership. Care should be taken, also, to avoid the implication that a participant is committing herself to a long, or even indefinite, series of meetings. If the material is meaningful in terms of the needs they themselves recognize, and if the circumstances are not threatening, then a desire to renew the experience, it may be hoped, will originate with the participants.

Fourth, opportunities for educational experiences might also be arranged in cooperation with such agencies as prenatal and well-baby clinics. One of the chief complaints that young mothers have about clinics (and one of the most popular excuses they offer for not getting clinic care) is the necessity for long waits. In some states, the Extension Service has found this waiting period a good time for food demonstrations and nutrition classes, with public health nurses, dieticians, and volunteer leaders assisting in the program. The postnatal classes and demonstrations many hospitals offer for new mothers might also be expanded to include a broader spectrum of skills and information. In these, Extension home economists could make a valuable contribution, and become more familiar as resource persons within

the community.

A concentrated effort should be made to find local leadership for 4-H Club groups in the urban neighborhoods where potential school dropout girls live. Programs should be adapted to their needs and interests, recognizing that the club may not hold them as long as it does girls in higher socioeconomic levels.

One major deterrent in reaching low socioeconomic groups with Extension information is that publications have, for the most part, been prepared with a middle class clientele in mind. A fifth recommendation for Extension educators is, therefore, that materials be prepared for use within the specific limitations and interests of this group.

Another problem of which Extension personnel must be aware is that within the lowest socioeconomic levels there is a built-in distrust of strangers, even well-meaning ones. The guard against prying, snooping, and interference from outside is in force regardless of whether the intruder is visiting nurse, social worker, truant officer, or bill collector. Association with "outsiders" is frequently unhappy, and families grow understandably resentful of a procession of representatives of various agencies. Increased cooperation among agencies is therefore suggested. Here, too, previous introduction of the Extension worker within the school setting may encourage acceptance of contact in the out-of-school situation.

Implications for Education of Professional Home Economists

The first task of persons who are to work with socioeconomic groups other than their own is to clarify their own concepts and to reexamine the goals of the work for which they themselves will be responsible. They must recognize that a family in a low socioeconomic stratum is not just a middle class family with less money. Given the same income they will not behave alike. To work effectively as a teacher, one must recognize that in many ways the thinking and living of the persons to be taught may be different from one's own patterns. As Hollingshead and Redlich say of a similar hiatus between the psychiatric therapist and mental patients from lower socioeconomic strata, "It is not the patient's job a priori to understand the psychiatrist, but it is the psychiatrist's job to understand the patient." (14)

Until it is recognized that the profession's traditions are oriented to the needs and interests of the middle class, home economics will offer little that is truly meaningful to this group. Yet by its very nature home economics should be in a dominant position to prepare marriage-oriented girls, through education, for family living. And education, sociologists agree, is the only way in which the vicious chain of low intelligence wedded to low intelligence, low socioeconomic patterns wedded to low socioeconomic patterns, can be broken. Self-perpetuation is not inevitable.

Professional preparation of the teacher must include, on the college level, far greater awareness that this group exists, that its members have special needs that do not conform to those of middle-class students whose orientations more nearly parallel the teacher's. College students who anticipate work with this group in any way should have opportunities to come to know members of it as individual human beings.

Undergraduates who are preparing for home economics education, whether in secondary schools or in out-of-school programs, should have work in sociology in their required curriculum. In addition, they should serve a required number of hours as aides to welfare workers or public health nurses. Or they should be sponsored by such local organizations as have entree to, and can provide contact with, low socioeconomic families on a basis of sufficient continuity to permit development of some understandings, appreciations, and working relationships. Such field work might be undertaken as one aspect of a special senior problem to provide additional experience outside the undergraduate's own level of orientation.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study was the small number of young homemakers that constituted the population. Although on a preliminary basis, general patterns may be discerned, it is unsafe to base broad generalizations on 20 cases. The correlations of Marriage Adjustment Score with the variables of difference in intelligence between husband and wife, and difference in grade level of husband and wife, especially, indicate that a larger number of cases is needed if conclusions are to be drawn.

Moreover, the population studied was representative of a small city only. Findings might vary considerably if respondents were rural residents, or lived in small towns or large cities. Similar, but broader studies, undertaken with youthfully marrying school dropouts in rural, small town, and large city contexts would provide more information on how skills for family living can be most effectively taught under varying conditions. It would be desirable to compare actual curriculum content, and methods by which it has been offered, with subject matter recollected, to try to determine why certain areas are recalled and others are not.

Since the 4-H program in the study county has not, in the past, had clubs organized in the geo-economic areas in which girls in this study lived, no investigation of 4-H contact or experiences was included in the question schedule. During the past few months, however, two clubs have been organized in these neighborhoods on a pilot basis. So future studies should include examination of the effectiveness of the 4-H program with girls of low socioeconomic background.

In spite of these limitations, the writer feels that this study has served as a basis for further and more detailed investigations into the needs of this segment of the population. The fact that observations made in this study are in agreement with those of investigators of other aspects of similar groups lends validity to the findings.

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